



## Quarterly Report April 1, 2014 – May 31, 2014

### PACT II “Projet d’Assistance Ciblée aux Communautés de Tchirozérine”

*Funded by USAID / Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA)*



*Secretary counting the number of shares per member and capital sharing of a VSLA in Goofat Est (Tchirozérine commune)*



*Irish potato processing demonstration in Tabelot*

COUNTRY CONTACT	HEADQUARTERS CONTACT	PROJECT SUMMARY
Thierno Samba Diallo Niger Country Director Quartier Issa-Beri, Rue IB28 BP 10632, Niamey, Niger Telephone: +227-2073-9633 Email: <a href="mailto:tdiallo@ne.mercycorps.org">tdiallo@ne.mercycorps.org</a>	John Stephens Senior Program Officer Address: 45 SW Ankeny Street, Portland, OR 97204, USA Telephone: +1 503 896 5028 Email: <a href="mailto:jstephens@mercycorps.org">jstephens@mercycorps.org</a>	Award No: AID-OFDA-G-13-00082 Start Date: June 1, 2013 End Date: May 31, 2014  Report Date: July 31, 2014 Total Award: US \$1,063,796

## 1. Executive Summary

Designed as a follow-on to the USAID/OFDA funded *Projet d'Assistance Ciblée aux Communautés de Tchirozerine* (PACT) program (2012-2013), PACT II continues to support the recovery of vulnerable households from successive years of crises in the Department of Tchirozerine in the Agadez region. The goal of the program is to consolidate initial recovery gains made in the food security and livelihoods situation of disaster-affected communities in the Tchirozerine Department, to prevent them from sliding back into extreme vulnerability.

During the last reporting period of the program, PACT II achieved the following key results:

- Training of 45 trainers in 15 villages of Tabelot commune in agricultural products processing and conservation techniques;
- Restitution of the agricultural training on conservation and processing techniques for 475 producers in 15 villages in the Tabelot commune;
- Support to 96 VSLAs in capital sharing to graduate from their first savings and loans cycle and initiation of a new cycle of 12 months;
- Formation and training of 37 new VSLAs by 18 village agents trained by the project;
- Support to 493 micro-entrepreneurs who received the second tranche of funding for their businesses;
- 255 beneficiaries from agricultural, VSLA and entrepreneurial activities shared their perspective on program successes and lessons learned during four workshops held in Tchirozérine, Dabaga, Agadez and Tabelot;
- Final program evaluation in 29 villages on a sample of 636 households to assess the impact of the program in the intervention area; and,
- Filming of two documentaries on program activities, in order to communicate the successes and impact from the PACT II program.

## 2. Program Overview

The population of the Tchirozerine Department has suffered from the devastating effects of recurring food crises, natural disasters and regional instability in recent years. Continued support of vulnerable households in this region to meet their recovery needs during 12 months aimed at preventing them from backsliding into more vulnerable conditions, and enables them to weather future shocks. Despite the relatively improved rainfall in 2012 in the country compared to previous years, the ability of communities to meet their household needs has been weakened by repeated crises and they remained unable to satisfy their needs and recover on their own. The *Dispositif National de Prévention et de Gestion des Catastrophes et Crises Alimentaires* (DNPGCCA)<sup>1</sup> preliminary findings revealed that an estimated 66 villages in the Tchirozerine Department would be unable to meet their needs and classified as vulnerable in 2014. To enable the population of Tchirozerine to recover from these repeated shocks, it proved crucial to consolidate gains from the initial PACT program, targeting some of the existing beneficiaries and extending to new beneficiaries in new villages in the Tchirozerine Department. Building on the achievements of the PACT program (2012-2013), PACT II helped target vulnerable communities improve their food security, recover and maintain their household and productive assets, strengthen their economic prospects and promote a sustainable recovery, while reducing their vulnerability to future shocks; using a community-led, market driven approach.

PACT II included a package of interventions designed to consolidate and extend initial recovery gains made in the food security and livelihoods situation of disaster-affected communities in Tchirozerine in order to prevent them from sliding back into extreme vulnerability, by achieving two main objectives: 1) enhancing crop production of horticultural producers, and 2) restoring livelihood activities of producers and micro-entrepreneurs.

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<sup>1</sup> National body for the prevention and management of disasters and food crises

### 3. Security

The security situation was relatively calm during the reporting period. Armed attacks and robberies did occur on commercial vehicles along the Agadez-Tabelot route, which did not affect Mercy Corps program activities. A recently discovered gold mine 1,400km north of Agadez increased criminality in town as a number of opportunistic groups fled back to Agadez after losing their savings at the site in search of gold. The program took measures to reinforce its security protocols (e.g. travel restrictions, increased office security) and remained vigilant about the security of its staff, partners and beneficiaries.

### 4. Performance Summary

#### Award-Level Beneficiaries

Cumulative Period Targeted		Reporting Period Reached		Cumulative Period Reached	
Total	IDP	Total	IDP	Total	IDP
18,900 individuals (2,700 households)	0	23,639 individuals (3,377 households)	0	23,856 individuals (3,408 households)	0

#### Progress to Date

<u>SECTOR #1</u> Agriculture and Food Security <i>Subsector: Improving Agricultural Production/ Food Security</i>		<i>Objective: Producers enhance crop production</i>			
Geographic Area (s)		The Tchirozerine Department of the Agadez Region of the Republic of Niger			
Beneficiaries Targeted		18,900 individuals (2,700 households); 0 IDPs			
Beneficiaries Reached (Reporting Period)		3,640 individuals (520 households); 0 IDPs			
Beneficiaries Reached (Cumulative)		18,949 individuals (2,707 households); 0 IDPs			
Subsector: Improving Agricultural Production/Food Security					
INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Applicable	Cumulative Value Targeted	Reporting Period Reached	Cumulative Reached
Number of people benefiting from seed systems/agricultural input activities, by sex.	Male	Yes	675	455*	9474
	Female	Yes	2,025	65*	9475
Projected increase in the number of months of food self-sufficiency due to seed system activities/ agricultural input for beneficiary households.	N/A	Yes	50%	8% <sup>**</sup>	8%

\*Individuals directly participating in activities. Based on an average household size of 7, this represents approximately 1820 males and 1820 females benefiting from agricultural inputs.

\*\*Producers sell part of the vegetables they produce to purchase staple food. Although the program successfully promoted vegetable production and selling in the targeted villages, sales revenues were offset by a decrease in market prices since the beginning of 2014,

reducing the amount of food that households could buy and stock. Detailed information will be provided in the project endline evaluation.

During the reporting period, the PACT II program strengthened the capacity of producers in agricultural products processing and conservation in 15 villages of Tabelot commune. This area was identified as experiencing the highest loss in agricultural products due to a lack in product conservation and insufficient sales on local markets. For this reason, producers in this commune expressed the need and willingness to participate in agricultural product conservation. The communities selected three farmers from each village, and field agents, supported by two local agents from the Ministry of Agriculture, trained a total of 45 trainers (all men) on processing and conservation techniques of Irish potato, tomato, onion, cabbage and carrot. The sessions used locally available equipment and materials so that the trainees could easily replicate the techniques in their own villages.

The three-day trainings of trainers were held in Tabelot and Mount Bagazam and covered the following themes:

- Advantages and importance of agricultural products processing and transformation
- Precautions to be taken during products processing
- Different steps in products' drying
- Different steps in vegetables and fruits processing
- Dried products conditioning and commercialization
- Dried products usage in food preparation and consumption
- Demonstration on drying of the following vegetables: tomato, cabbage, carrot and Irish potato

Restitutions of the agricultural training on processing and conservation techniques were organized in each of the 15 villages of Tabelot commune by the 45 trainers under direct supervision of local agents of the Ministry of Agriculture. 475 producers (410 men and 65 women), from the same households that had benefitted from seeds and been trained in improved agricultural techniques under PACT II during previous quarters took part in those restitutions to further strengthen their capacities to maximize nutritional benefits and profit obtained from crops production and selling prior to the program close-out.



*Practical demonstration of Irish potato processing during training of trainers in Tabelot*

SECTOR #2 Economic Recovery and Market Systems Subsector: LivelihoodsRestoration, Microfinance	Objective: Producers and micro-entrepreneurs restore their livelihood activities.				
Geographic Area (s)	The Tchirozerine Department of the Agadez Region of the Republic of Niger				
Beneficiaries Targeted	9,800 individuals (1,400 households) (0 IDPs)				
Beneficiaries Reached (Reporting Period)	23,639 individuals (3,377 households) (0 IDPs)				
Beneficiaries Reached (Cumulative)	23,856 individuals (3,408 households) (0 IDPs)				
Subsector: Livelihoods Restoration					
INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Applicable	Cumulative Value Targeted	Reporting Period Reached	Cumulative Reached
Number of people assisted through livelihood restoration activities, by sex	Male	Yes	150	18	18*
	Female	Yes	350	475	506*
Percent of beneficiaries reporting their livelihoods restored within three to six months after receiving support	N/A	Yes	50%	95%	95%
Total USD amount channeled into the program area through livelihoods restoration activities	N/A	Yes	\$75,000	0	\$77,865
Subsector: Microfinance					
INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Applicable	Cumulative Value Targeted	Reporting Period Reached	Cumulative Reached
Number of people, by sex, or MSEs newly receiving financial services or continuing to receive financial services due to USAID/OFDA support	Male	Yes	420	252	252
	Female	Yes	980	2,632	2,632
Percentage of financial service accounts/groups supported by USAID/OFDA that are functioning properly	N/A	Yes	70%	100%	100%
Total USD amount channeled into the program area through microfinance activities	N/A	No	N/A	N/A	N/A

\*Individuals directly participating in activities. Based on an average household size of 7, this represents approximately 1834 males and 1834 females benefiting from this activity.



During the reporting period, the PACT II program helped households in the target area restore their livelihoods activities by supporting VSLA groups in graduating from their first cycle and initiating a new cycle and by offering continued support to micro-entrepreneurs in managing and diversifying their small businesses.

### **Sub-sector: Microfinance**

During the reporting period, the PACT II program continued to advise the 18 village agents trained last quarter on VSLA methodology and supported capital sharing of 96 VSLA groups at the end of their savings and loan cycle and opening of a new cycle.

The 18 village agents continued delivering their training programs to the 20 new VSLAs they formed last quarter. The groups were able to initiate savings during their weekly meetings after the completion of the third module of the cycle on savings, solidarity funds and share. Four of the new groups have also formally registered their VSLAs with the local authorities. This leads to a total of 100 VSLAs (out of 133) formed with the support of the PACT I and PACT II programs currently registered with the local authorities, further strengthening member cohesion and commitment in pursuing the group's activities. In addition, the village agents formed 17 new groups this quarter, totaling 326 members (318 women and 8 men) from all three target communes of Agadez, Dabaga and Tchirozérine. 13 VSLAs have been trained in the first two of nine modules and 4 VSLAs in the first three modules. The program has seen steadily increasing demand to participate in VSLA activities after communities observe the gains made by existing groups. With the continued support of Mercy Corps and program partner ASUSU CIIGABA during the reporting period, the village agents were able to build their confidence and capacity in VSLA training and are ready to carry on offering this fee-based service to their communities, thereby ensuring the sustainability of the action.



*VSLA sharing its capital between members in Goofat (Thirozérine commune)*

At the end of the PACT I and PACT II programs, 133 VSLAs (see table 1) with a total of 2,884 members (252 men and 2,632 women) have been formed, trained and received continued support to conduct their weekly savings and loans operations, thereby assisting households to restore their livelihoods. 96 have successfully completed their first cycle and initiated a second one opting to increase share value, confident in the benefit of the VSLA methodology and thanks to the capital they accrued after the first cycle. 37 will continue to be trained over the coming months by the 18 village agents supported by the PACT II program. The VSLA activity increased members' access to credit and facilitated the development and strengthening of incoming generating activities, which increased household revenues and the amount that VSLA members are able and willing to save each week. Those groups fully graduated from the program and are now autonomous and willing to continue their microfinance activities.

Many groups have expressed an interest in developing a network of VSLAs to exchange and learn from each other's successes and challenges and strengthen their negotiating power with larger businesses and local

authorities. In addition, ASUSU SA, the Microfinance Institution part of the ASUSU group, has recently opened a branch in Agadez. Their agents met with the VSLAs to present the services they offer. PACT II program staff has encouraged VSLA members demonstrating sound business plans and a need for further investment to apply for loans with the ASUSU micro-credit branch. The program also sensitized VSLA groups on the possibility of opening a bank account with ASUSU SA, particularly for groups concerned with the security of their cash boxes within their village

At the end of their first cycle, the results from the 96 VSLAs supported by the program included:

- Savings totaled \$51,081 overall;
- 577 members have received a loan;
- Loans have totaled \$8,649;
- \$2,568 has been raised to assist members in emergency situations; and
- 10 groups have implemented income generating activities and earned a total of \$1,485 in profit

**Table 1: VSLAs supported during PACT II**

Commune	Number of VSLA	Number of men	Number of women	Total beneficiaries
Agadez	26	14	394	408
Dabaga	25	8	501	509
Tchirozérine	82	230	1737	1967
<b>Total:</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>2,632</b>	<b>2,884</b>

#### **Sub-sector: Livelihoods Restoration**

Last quarter, 514 micro-entrepreneurs received a second tranche of funding to recover their livelihoods activities. This quarter the program continued to support the cohort of micro-entrepreneurs, and program field agents made visits to 493 of these actors to ensure the success of their businesses. The remaining 21 micro-entrepreneurs could not be reached either due to personal travel, illness or pregnancy, but local associations or VSLA groups confirmed that these individuals were also still pursuing their activities. Monitoring showed that the majority of the small businesses (400 out of 493) had spent the entire amount of the second tranche, whereas 93 had spent 80% of the second tranche according to their business plan. While many beneficiaries used the remaining 20% of the grant to purchase small ruminants to keep as live capital and sell later at a profit, these micro-entrepreneurs were advised and mentored during the reporting period to efficiently meet the objectives of their business plan in a timeframe that takes into account seasonal prices fluctuations. In some cases micro-entrepreneurs faced market saturation in their communities and were therefore advised and supported to identify and develop additional activities to further diversify their source of income.

At the start of the program, the 514 beneficiaries selected to receive the first tranche of financial support organized themselves into 69 solidarity groups. Grouping beneficiaries allowed individual entrepreneurs to access support and mitigate risk. Solidarity groups were encouraged to share experiences and save together in a small cushion fund that can be given or loaned to a member as needed. During the reporting period, Mercy Corps organized and facilitated focus group discussions with the 69 self-selected solidarity groups created under PACT II in 14 villages of the communes of Agadez, Dabaga, and Tchirozerine. The discussions aimed at identifying the mentoring needs of each solidarity group and 514 micro-entrepreneurs who received the

second tranche and preparing support plans to ensure small businesses' sustainability at the end of the program. Based on the needs identified by beneficiaries, the field agents advised and provided refresher training to micro-entrepreneurs on the following topics:

- Small businesses development and activities diversification
- Primary materials acquisition and stock building to mitigate risks linked to changing market prices
- Solidarity groups regular meeting, registering of groups with local authorities, and members' support plan design
- Strengthening of savings and loans activities within solidarity groups and linking with microfinance institutions

Links and dialogue between solidary groups were initiated where more experienced groups were able to advise other micro-entrepreneurs regarding specific technical or organizational issues. The field agents also orientated solidarity groups towards local technical departments or financial institutions providing relevant services in their region, such as the local chamber of commerce or microfinance institution ASUSU SA, which will offer micro-entrepreneurs with savings accounts and facilitated access to credit. ASUSU SA will also provide the small businesses that apply for loans with financial management training and mentoring to ensure proper management of their capital.

**Table 2: Type and number of small businesses created**

Type of entrepreneurship	# of beneficiaries
Catering	213
Small commerce	196
Food processing	66
Artisan crafts	23
Dying	10
Cosmetic products	5
Tailoring	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>514</b>

## 5. Monitoring & Evaluation

During the reporting period, monitoring has focused on the program final evaluation, organization of workshops on lessons learned and successes and filming of two documentaries on program activities.

### **PACT II program final evaluation**

An endline survey was initiated to assess the impact of PACT II activities in consolidating initial recovery gains made in the food security and livelihoods situation of disaster-affected communities in the Tchirozerine Department, to prevent them from sliding back into extreme vulnerability. The survey focused on evaluating the food security status of the target population and included relevant dietary, food self-sufficiency and coping strategies indicators. Mercy Corps M&E team also evaluated the program impact in restoring the livelihoods of producers and micro-entrepreneurs, as reported by beneficiaries three to six months after receiving support. The results of this survey will be presented in the final program report and endline evaluation report.

### **Local workshops on successes and lessons learned**

The PACT II field agents organized four workshops with community beneficiaries in order to capture the successes, challenges and lessons learned in agriculture, VSLA and entrepreneurial programming from the beneficiary perspective. 255 of them participated in those events in the communes of Agadez, Tchirozérine, Dabaga and Tabelot.



The communities recognized their participation in beneficiaries' identification and at the various stages of the program (seeds distribution, training of trainers, village agents' selection, etc.) as key for the program success. Producers appreciated the content and relevance of agricultural trainings but recommended to increase the time spent in practical trainings in future. The support of micro-entrepreneurs was a success in allowing women and men to access funds, strengthen their capacity, and restore their livelihoods over the course of six months. Beneficiaries particularly valued the disbursement process' transparency and continued monitoring and support provided by the program team. They proposed however to consider allocating different amounts to businesses to ensure a better adequacy between the funds received and the needs of each micro-entrepreneur. The communities recommended training village agents earlier in the program cycle and involve as many women as possible but confirmed that the service they provide within their villages was a strong commitment to ensure the continuation of the activity beyond PACT II life

### **Filming of two documentaries on program activities**

At the end of the reporting period, two documentaries were produced in order to communicate the successes and impact of PACT II, hearing those directly from the mouth of beneficiaries, local authorities and partners involved in program activities. The first film presents the PACT II program activities globally from a beneficiary viewpoint, while the second focuses on presenting the VSLA component of the program. The later will also serve as tool to present the VSLA methodology and sensitize communities and local authorities on its contribution to improving communities' livelihoods. These films will be shared with USAID/OFDA with the submission of the final programmatic report.

## **6. Coordination**

Mercy Corps continued to work closely with regional authorities, notably the agricultural extension services for the training of trainers and restitution of training on agricultural products processing and conservation. As from the onset of the program, we worked in close collaboration with our partner ASUSU CIIGABA for the mentoring and support to VSLA groups and village agents. We also participated in humanitarian coordination at the regional level with NGO and UN partners through the 3N initiative, meetings organized by OCHA and the food security cluster. Finally, Mercy Corps met with government authorities and partners at the commune, department and regional levels to inform them of the program closeout and share successes and lessons learned.

## **7. Conclusion**

During the reporting period, Mercy Corps trained 45 trainers and 475 producers in agricultural products processing and conservation techniques, thus ensuring that beneficiaries are able to maximize nutritional benefits and profit from sales of agricultural products. Field agents assisted the sharing of capital and initiation of a new cycle of 96 fully autonomous VSLAs and provided continued support to 18 village agents creating and training 37 new VSLAs in the target area. The program monitored and mentored 493 micro-entrepreneurs who had benefited from the second disbursement of funds and strengthened 69 solidarity groups to continue supporting small businesses beyond the program life. The PACT II program finished at the end of May, thus activities also focused on program closeout with the final evaluation conducted in 32 villages and the organization of four workshops with 255 beneficiaries from agricultural, VSLA and entrepreneurial activities to hear their perspective on program successes and lessons learned. The PACT II program has demonstrated continued success in supporting recovery in target communities in the Agadez region, improving food security and livelihoods with beneficiary households. From the beginning, Mercy Corps created an exit strategy that would ensure the sustainability of program activities, by emphasizing the transfer of knowledge and building the capacity of local leaders, structures and beneficiary communities.